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India: The situation of members, supporters and activists of Akali Dal (Mann), including their activities and treatment (2000 - 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The Akali Dal (Mann) is a political party based in Punjab state, India (Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology 3 Nov. 2005), and is a faction of the Shiromani Akali Dal political party (ibid. 20 March 2000), the main political organization of India's Sikh community (*Political Parties of the World* 2005, 298; ibid. 2002, 246; Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology 3 Nov. 2005). In sources consulted for this Response, the Akali Dal (Mann) party is also referred to as the Shiromani Akali Dal (Mann) party (ibid.; Press Trust of India 19 Feb. 2002; ibid. 25 Mar. 2004; ibid. 6 Sept. 2000; *The Times of India* 25 Mar. 2004; ibid. 14 Aug. 2000), and by the abbreviations SAD (M) (India n.d.b.; Press Trust of India 24 Sept. 2004; ibid. 19 Feb. 2002) and SAD (Mann) (ibid.; NDTV.com 13 Feb. 2002).

The leader of the Akali Dal (Mann) party is Simranjit Singh Mann (India n.d.a; Press Trust of India 17 Apr. 2004; ibid. 24 Sept. 2004; ibid. 14 June 2005; Rediff.com 14 June 2005; *Hindustan Times* 14 June 2005; *The Times of India* 14 Aug. 2000), a former senior Punjab police officer (*East Bay Express* 15 June 2005; PUCL 30 Oct. 2005; *The Times of India* 24 Feb. 2003; ibid. 14 Aug. 2000). Media reports also name Simranjit Singh Mann as the leader of another faction of the Akali Dal, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) (IAN 24 Sept. 2004), which is also referred to as Akali Dal (Amritsar) (Press Trust of India 24 Mar. 2004; Rediff.com 14 June 2005).

In 2000, the party had two elected members (*The Times of India* 14 Aug. 2000), and although six Akali Dal (Mann) candidates ran in the 2004 national elections, the party did not win any seats in the parliament or state assembly (India n.d.a).

Activities of the Akali Dal (Mann)

The Akali Dal (Mann) advocates recognition of the Sikh "right to self-determination and an independent Sikh state" (Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology 3 Nov. 2005; *Voices for Freedom* 23 Oct. 2005; Press Trust of India 6 Sept. 2000). Details of the activities of the Akali Dal (Mann) were scarce among the sources consulted for this Response, but media reports suggested one principle of the party is protection of minority group interests (Press Trust of India 19 Feb. 2002), including lower class Dalits (*The Times of India* 14 Aug. 2000). The activities of Simranjit Singh Mann figured prominently in a survey of news articles for the time period 2000 to 2005, some of which included "provocative" speeches (Rediff.com 14 June 2005), crossing into Pakistan on a pilgrimage to a Sikh shrine despite the Indian federal government's ban on such travel (Rediff.com 11 Apr. 2002; NDTV.com 12 Apr. 2002), as well as demands for a government apology for Operation Bluestar (*The Times of India* 16 May 2002), "anti-Sikh riots" in 1984 (AI 16 Aug. 2005), the withdrawal of troops on the Indian and Pakistani border (Press Trust of India 5 May 2002), the release of the Tamil Nadu state political party Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) general secretary from prison (NDTV.com 28 Mar. 2003) and a lift on the ban of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (*The Hindu* 10 Apr. 2003).

One news article reported that in September 2004, Akali Dal (Mann) "activists" allegedly threw stones and waved black flags to Bharatiya Janata Party leader Uma Bharti as she entered Punjab state on a march (Press Trust of India 24 September 2004).

Treatment of Akali Dal (Mann) Members

Referring to Simranjit Singh Mann and the Akali Dal (Mann) party, the Delhi-based human rights organization People's Union for Civil Liberties commented, "there is no prejudice against him or his party in the State" (30 Oct. 2005). An associate professor of social and cultural anthropology and specialist in Indian affairs stated in 3 November 2005 correspondence to the Research Directorate that state and federal government treatment of Akali Dal (Mann) members is "often reasonable, but also can be coated with suspicion" and that society "often tends to be suspicious" of Akali Dal (Mann) members. This professor continued that "[i]n instances where members ... are suspected of extremism or alleged to have links with extremists, state treatment is reportedly severe, including illegal detention and torture" (ibid.).

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International annual reports for the period 2000 through 2004 (HRW 2005; *ibid.* 2004; *ibid.* 2003; *ibid.* 2002; *ibid.* 2001; AI 2005; *ibid.* 2004; *ibid.* 2003; *ibid.* 2002; *ibid.* 2001), as well as the United States Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the period 2000 through 2002 fail to mention the Akali Dal (Mann) party, members of the party or the leader of the party, Simranjit Singh Mann (*Country Reports 2000* 23 Feb. 2001; *Country Reports 2001* 4 Mar. 2002; *Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003). However, *Country Reports 2003* and *Country Reports 2004* state that government officials detained Akali Dal (Mann) leader Simranjit Singh Mann in February 2003 and in February 2004 (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1.d.; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, Sec. 1d) under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act (TADA) for making "an inflammatory speech" in 1991, in which he allegedly called for a separate state of Khalistan (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1.d.; Press Trust of India 12 Nov. 2002), a homeland for Sikhs (Rediff.com 22 Feb. 2003). The court charged the Akali Dal (Mann) leader with Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 4(2) of TADA for his activities in 1991 (*Times of India* 24 Feb. 2003; Press Trust of India 12 Nov. 2002), but the case was closed in April 2002 (*ibid.*) and then reopened by the Supreme Court in November 2003, since the "proper procedure" had not been followed (*ibid.*; *Times of India* 24 Feb. 2003).

Police arrested Simranjit Singh Mann again in March 2004 (Rediff.com 24 Mar. 2004), along with other members of the Akali Dal (Mann) party in Punjab state, due to "breach of peace" along Deputy Prime Minister Advani's pilgrimage route (Press Trust of India 25 Mar. 2004; *ibid.* 24 Mar. 2004; NDTV.com 24 Mar. 2004; IAN 24 Sept. 2004). Another report on the same incident stated that Punjab police "detained" hundreds of Akali Dal (Mann) "workers" in police cells and arrested others prior to Deputy Prime Minister Advani's arrival in Punjab (*Times of India* 25 Mar. 2004). The general secretary of the Akali Dal (Mann) party reported that police had raided party members' houses and "many" party members had been arrested (*ibid.*). Arrests connected to this event were made in Khanna, Fatehgarh Sahab, Batala, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala, Nawanshahar, Sangrur, Ludhiana, Jagraon, Ropar and Moga districts (*ibid.*; NDTV.com 24 Mar. 2004). *Country Reports 2004* states that Simranjit Singh Mann was released two days following his March arrest (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1.d.).

In June 2005, Punjab police arrested Simranjit Singh Mann in the Sangrur district of Punjab in connection with four different cases of sedition by Punjab police (Rediff.com 14 June 2005; The Press Trust of India 14 June 2005; *Hindustan Times* 14 June 2005), including allegedly demanding an independent Khalistan (Press Trust of India 14 June 2005; *Hindustan Times* 14 June 2005), delivering inflammatory speeches on the anniversary of Operation Bluestar (*ibid.*) and "waging a war against India" (Voices of Freedom Asia 23 Oct. 2005; Rediff.com 14 June 2005). Akali Dal (Mann) executive committee member Bachan Singh Bains and Ropar district youth wing president Amandeep Singh Abiana were also arrested and sent to judicial custody (*Hindustan Times* 14 June 2005). Additional information on the treatment of members of Akali Dal (Mann) could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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